HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

BY DEAN STAHL | PHOTOGRAPHED BY BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER

SOME SKILLS JUST aren't taught in architecture school — the best way to hang a door, for instance, or how to nail down a straight row of shingles.

Architect Alison Walker Brems elected to learn the hands-on part of building in 1998, after she moved into the house her future husband, James Brems, used for a sculpture studio and bachelor's quarters.

The house had been cut into separate rentals, and stairways to the top floor and basement had been walled off.

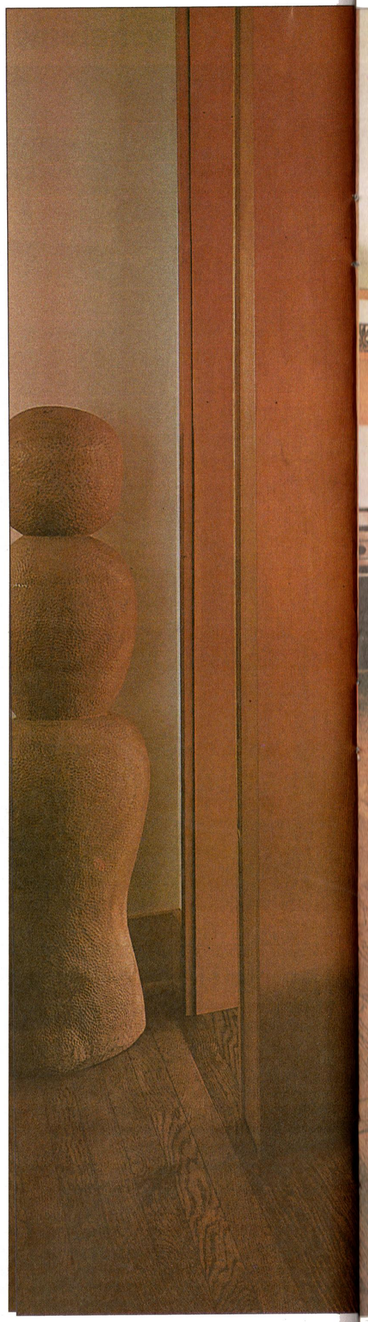
"We poked a hole in what was the closet wall and had a ladder down to the basement for the cat," James recalls. "You could say the cat was the impetus for this."

"As a friend of mine put it, this house was gnarly," Alison says. "So many people had practiced on it that it was kind of like a crossword puzzle."

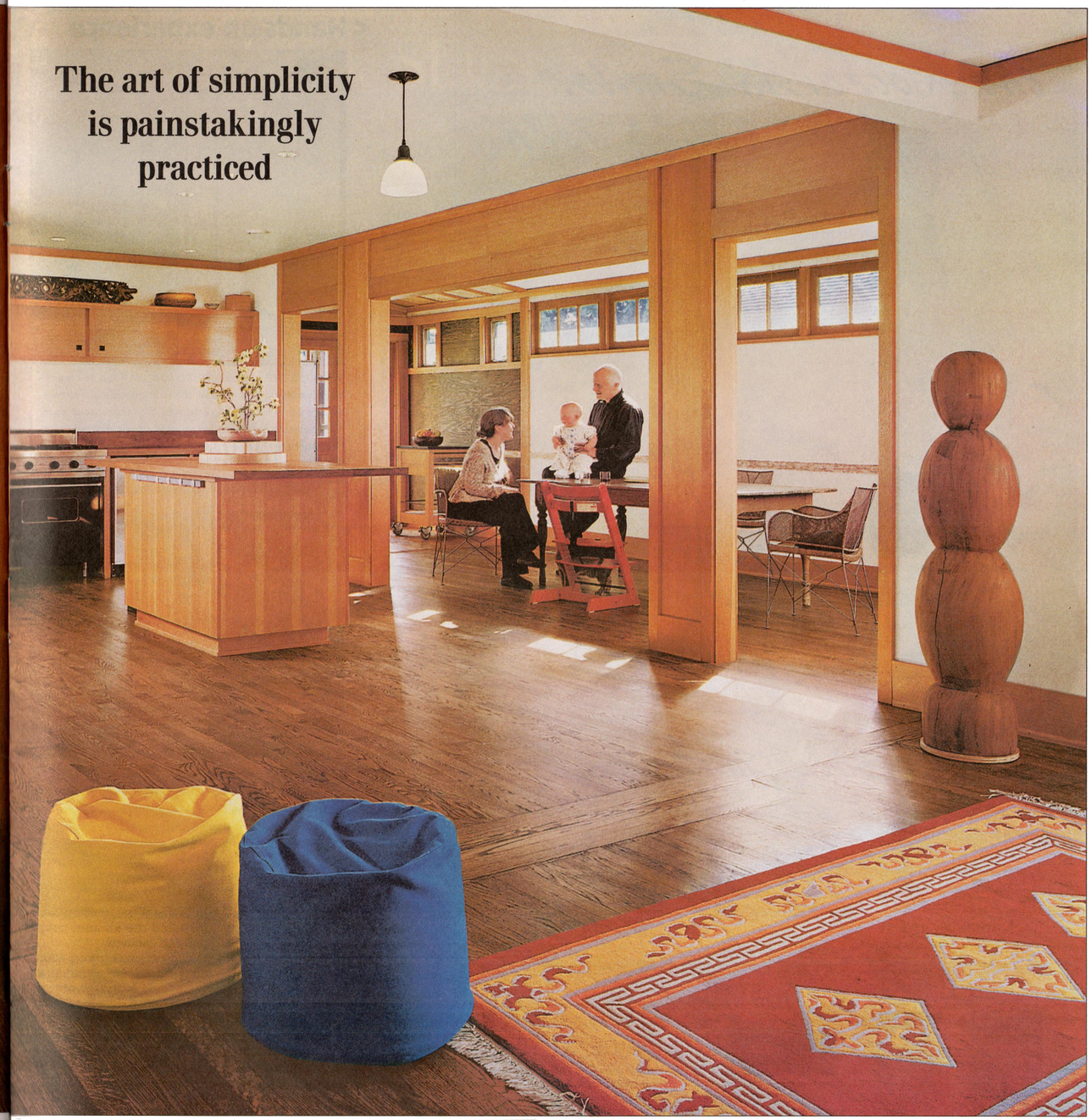
After years of tearing that hodgepodge apart and piecing it together, the couple's 1922 bungalow in Seattle's Ravenna district has been revived, with no loss of character or soul.

Continued on page 48 >

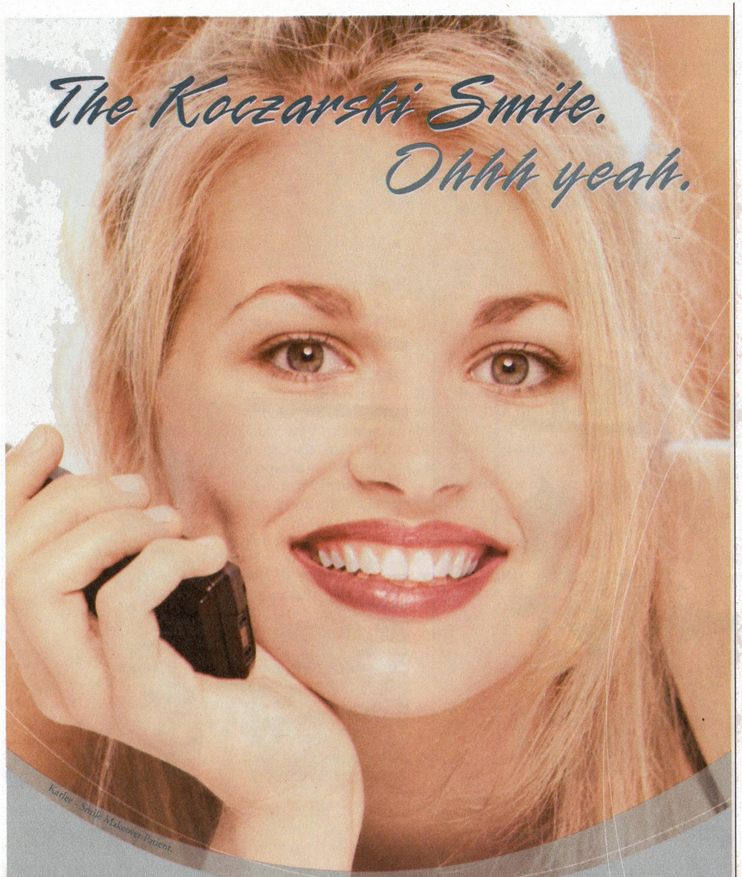
"WE DESIGNED THE HOUSE before we knew we were going to have Sonia," architect Alison Walker Brems says. "Some things, such as the below-counter refrigerator, aren't as practical for us now. This tells me that the way to see this house is as something that will always be in evolution."



The art of simplicity is painstakingly practiced



ALISON, SONIA AND JAMES BREMS gather around their dining table in a section of the house that had originally been an open porch. Clear-fir trim, recycled-teak countertops, oak floors and fir cabinets are practical and cheering, yet honor the original builder.



No Stress. Just Smiles.

No Stress.
Fear and time are the reasons many people avoid going to the dentist. Sedation Dentistry will change that forever. While you rest comfortably, Dr. Koczarski can perform years of dental treatment in one or two visits!

Just Smiles.
Picture yourself with a new smile that radiates beauty, trust and confidence in as little as two visits. You know you deserve it. Now you can have it.

New Patient Rewards.
To welcome you to our practice, you will receive a complimentary *Teeth Whitening Kit, a value of $525. Call Josie today at 425-486-2200 and visit us online at www.nwsmiles.com.

*with complete exam, diagnostic photography, cleaning and necessary x-rays

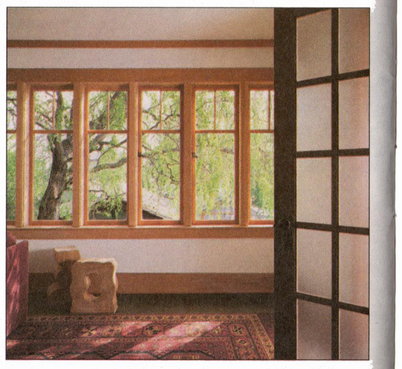
Voted Top Dentist

Dr. Koczarski

abc EXTREME MAKEOVER
Featured on Extreme Makeover

KOCZARSKI
Aesthetic & Laser Dentistry

BECAUSE THE JAMES AND ALISON WANTED to keep the large windows along one wall, the Hansgrohe circular shower, with its sleek Philippe Starck fixtures, was the best solution in the downstairs bathroom. James painstakingly restored the bead-board ceiling and installed the tile floor.



JAMES CONVERTED a south-facing downstairs porch into a sunroom, which served as the couple's bedroom until they remodeled the top floor. They salvaged the distinctive windows, eliminate disintegrating wood and poured a foundation to replace rotting piers. Lime-green paint was hand-scraped off all the woodwork.

Continued from page 46

The plan was to reconfigure interior spaces, add refinements and let the house's history express itself, where appropriate. A major goal was to do all the work themselves — demolishing walls and lifting glue-lam beams included — and to pay as they went. With one exception, they succeeded: Rand Pigot, a cabinetmaker in Arlington, crafted and installed the kitchen counters and cabinets.

The original living room had been just large enough so "you could fit in two of your best friends," James says. The couple transformed this and other cramped rooms and dark hallways into a living-dining room/kitchen on the main floor. Enclosing a

Continued on page 50

Bassett FURNITURE DIRECT
You've Never Bought Furniture Like This Before

SOUTHCENTER
5951 So. 180th Street
Tukwila
206.575.8877
(South of Southcenter next to Claim Jumper)

OVERLAKE
2233 Bel Red Road
Redmond
425.968.4663
(Up NE 24th from Sears)

LYNNWOOD
2701 184th Street SW
Lynnwood
425.967.1800
(Across from Alderwood Mall)

NORTHGATE
318 NE Northgate Way
Seattle
206.267.5350
(Across from Northgate Mall)

Store Hours: Southcenter, Lynnwood and Northgate MON-FRI 10am - 9pm, Sat 10am - 8pm, SUN 11am - 6pm. Overlake Hours: MON-THURS 10am - 7pm, FRI 10am - 8pm, SAT 10am - 7pm, SUN 11am - 6pm. Discounts taken off MSRP. Does not apply to Sony and Guardian. Offers not subject to prior sales and cannot be combined with any other offer. Sale through Tuesday May 31, 2005.

Visit us at www.bassettfurnituredirect.net

< Hands-on experience

Continued from page 48

back porch created a large sunroom with southern exposure; a small office is off the kitchen.

James moved his workshop and sculpture studio from the main floor to the unfinished basement, which he had dug out by hand and where he poured concrete for the floors and walls. He fit windows, revised an entryway and gained a well-lit working space.

The kitchen was relocated from a corner to center stage. A side porch was enclosed and flooring extended to create the dining area. This informal space invites conversation while meals are prepared. Clerestory windows provide light while preserving privacy.

The Bremses loosely define the motif for their remodel as Craftsman/Japanese farmhouse. In traditional Japanese households, the "tokonama" alcove holds what is beautiful and full of meaning. Here, in the kitchen, benign spirits are settling in.

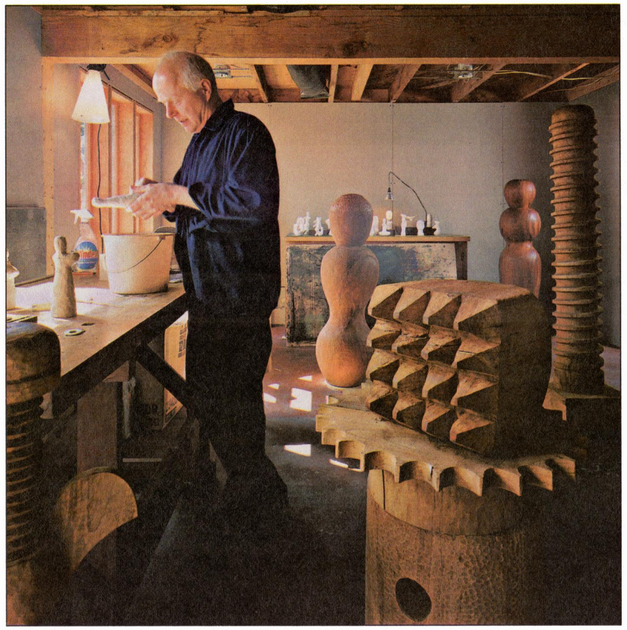
"When James moved all of his studio downstairs," Alison says, "we were able to see how we used the space as a family. So, doing the kitchen last was very fortunate."

Elsewhere, they scraped old fir trim for "hours and days" and added new where necessary.

"I find real value in bringing something back to its near-original state," Alison says. Scuffs or original colors, such as traces of lime-green paint around the doorways, give this house character, she believes; people ask to hear the story.

"We were always fighting that sense of an achievable perfection," James says.

Still, James painstakingly remodeled the bathroom to meld vintage materials with high-style modern fixtures. He also pieced together new oak flooring in most of the living area to match what remained of original flooring.



SCULPTOR JAMES BREMS remodeled the basement to have three rooms for work and storage. Pieces from his Big Doll and Widget World series keep him company as he shapes clay into totemic figures.

Upstairs, breaking up two small bedrooms and an attic created space for an expansive hideaway with whitewashed fir floors, skylights and generous windows for enjoying the view. The couple framed in a master bathroom but retained the period style by installing the original claw-foot bathtub from downstairs. Near the master-bedroom suite is a bedroom for their 9-month-old daughter, Sonia.

"I always like houses where you walk inside and you are surprised by them," Alison says. "Here, you are expecting small rooms, but there is a big, open space. It is so much lighter; it's a very different feeling from the rest of the house."

The overall Asian influ-

Continued on next page >

RAISE SUNKEN CONCRETE

Raise concrete driveways, patios, garage and basement floors in one day. "Slabjacking" is the cost effective alternative to expensive replacement.

A-PRO INCORPORATED

Call for a FREE estimate 425-747-1157

APRO**105NA

BUNGALOW BASICS

MISSION CRAFTSMAN ARTS & CRAFTS

Complement your home with furnishings from some of today's finest Arts & Crafts designers and artisans.

Artwork • Textiles and Kits
Art Pottery • Frames • Stencils • Tiles
Clocks • Wool Area Rugs • and more

912 B First Street, Snohomish ■ 360-568-6770
www.bungalow-basics.com

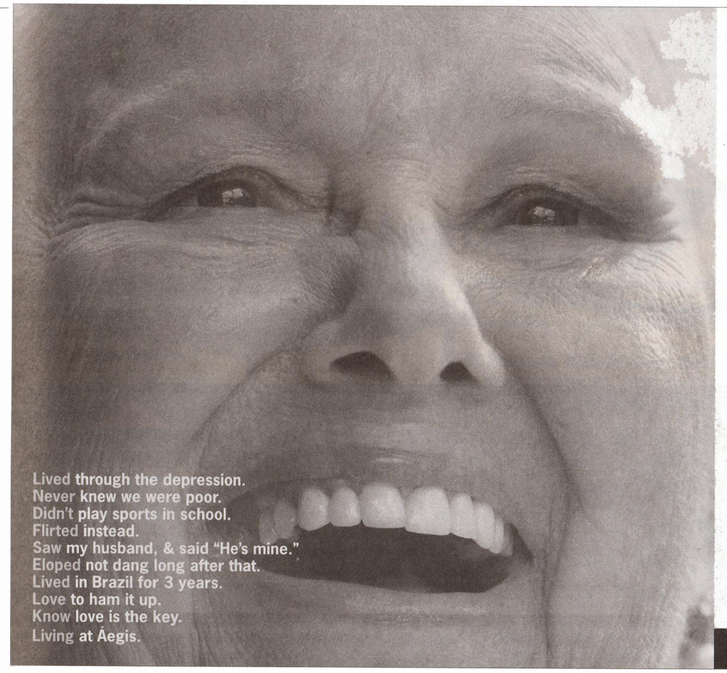
CLEARANCE SALE

TAKE AN ADDITIONAL 40% OFF SALE PRICES
On Selected Items Through Monday, May 30

100% Genuine 8 Way Hand-Tied Leather Sofa
with Inner Spring, Feather Plush Cushions
Retail Price $3305, Sale Price $1999, **NOW $1199**
Loveseat, Retail $3285, Sale $1949, **NOW $1169**
Chair, Retail $2288, Sale $1499, **NOW $899**
Limited to stock on hand.

Hayek's Leather Furniture

Seattle: 79 Columbia Street, (206) 682-4714, Mon-Sat 10-6, Sun 11-6
Lynnwood: 19417 36th Avenue West, (425) 771-5008, Mon-Sat 10-8, Sun 11-6
Southcenter/Tukwila: 1015 Andover Park West, (206) 575-3081, Mon-Sat 10-8, Sun 11-6
www.hayeksleatherfurniture.com


Lived through the depression.
Never knew we were poor.
Didn't play sports in school.
Flirted instead.
Saw my husband, & said "He's mine."
Eloped not dang long after that.
Lived in Brazil for 3 years.
Love to ham it up.
Know love is the key.
Living at Aegis.

Models Now Open!
Shoreline's newest retirement community

Create your own lifestyle in an elegant resort setting at Áegis Senior Living of Shoreline. Whether you enjoy working out in the fitness center, watching a movie in the theater, or learning how to salsa dance in the ballroom, your day is up to you.

Come see our wide selection of floor plans, from spacious studios to two-bedroom apartments and be part of living at Áegis.

Áegis Senior Living
People live here.

Áegis of Shoreline
14900 First Avenue NE
(206) 367-6700
www.aegisliving.com

Monthly rates from $1675. Call to schedule a personal visit today.

< Hands-on experience

Continued from previous page

ence is largely thanks to James' sensibilities. He lived in Japan several years ago while studying ceramics, has a background in Asian languages and is a longtime staff member at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture.

His father, Axel, worked in Seattle years ago as a builder for Gene Zema and other well-known architects. "He was my consultant on this," James says.

Alison, a graduate of the University of Washington architecture program, is an associate with Johnston Architects, a small Seattle firm specializing in custom houses, libraries and multi-family projects. She has been part of design teams for the Capitol Hill and Maple Valley libraries, and is at work on several residential projects.

She grew up in Colorado in a family of professional people and never got her hands dirty.

"Now I can hang a door," she says. "This has given me so much more confidence on the job site. I can go up to a contractor, and if the job hasn't been done right, I can say, 'I know this is hard, but if I can do it, you can, too.' "

Alison drafted plans for the Ravenna remodel, but the design was collaborative. "It might have been smarter to have torn the house down, but I'm glad we didn't," she says in retrospect.

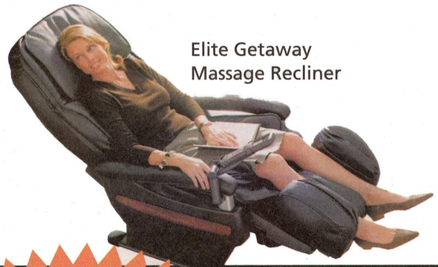
"Working on this house brought James and I together in the sense we could both be passionate about a communal project. The journey was most of the fun, despite living for years with exposed insulation. A lot of people get divorced in these situations. We got married — despite it."

Dean Stahl is a Seattle freelance writer. He can be reached at architectsathome@mac.com Benjamin Benschneider is a Pacific Northwest magazine staff photographer.

THE COUPLE transformed an attic and two small bedrooms into a light-filled master suite, which also serves as a play area for their daughter, Sonia. "I like houses where you walk in and are surprised by them," Alison says. Here, you are expecting small rooms after coming up a narrow stairwell.

RELAX THE BACK

Elite Getaway Massage Recliner



TM

the smartest way to sit or sleep

NO Interest
NO Payments
for 12 months
in all Washington stores
(on approved credit)

Lynnwood: 19220 Alderwood Mall Pkwy., Lynnwood (east of I-5) **425-771-4999**

Bellevue: 10620 NE 8th Street, Bellevue (near Bellevue Square) **425-688-0248**

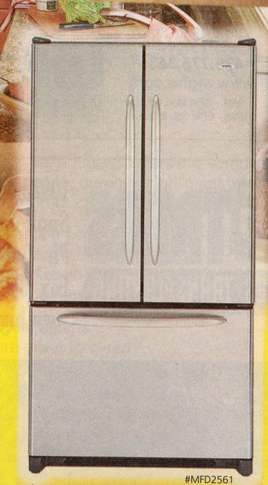
Southcenter: 200 Andover Park E., Tukwila (near Southcenter Mall) **206-575-3909**

Tacoma: 5015 Tacoma Mall Blvd., Tacoma (near Tacoma Mall) **253-475-2520**

NEW!
Try out our exclusive SolutionBed by Tempur-Pedic®

May is Maytag Month!

Innovative Kitchen Concepts



#MFD2561
the NEW Maytag French Door Refrigerator

This Kitchen Features:

- **Maytag Gas Double Oven Range**
  - Makes 2 Meals at Once
  - 5 Burners – 16,000 BTU Burner & Simmer Burner (#MGR6875)
- **Maytag Wide-by-Side Refrigerator**
  - Fits Your Pizza & Deli Trays Easily (#MZD2667)
- **Over-the-Range Convection Microwave**
  - Can Be Used as a Regular Oven (#MMV6178)
- **NEW Maytag French Door Refrigerator**
  - For Your Convenience: Freezer on the Bottom & Refrigerator on the top
  - 25 Cubic Ft. Capacity
  - Filtered Water & Ice

Big Kitchen Package Rebates Available
Contact the Following Stores for Details:

ARNOLD'S APPLIANCE
1034 116th Ave NE
Bellevue, WA
(425) 454-7929

ALBERT LEE APPLIANCE
1476 Elliott Ave W
Seattle, WA • (206) 282-2110
&
404 Strander Blvd
Tukwila, WA • (206) 433-1110

AMERICAN METER & APPLIANCE
1001 Westlake Ave N
Seattle, WA • (206) 282-4488

KENT FURNITURE & APPLIANCE
1015 Central Ave N
Kent, WA • (253) 854-3000

THE MAYTAG STORE
3105 Alderwood Mall Blvd
Lynnwood, WA • (425) 673-7416
&
363 Strander Blvd
Tukwila, WA • (206) 838-3006
&
Redmond Town Center
7223 170th Ave NE
Redmond, WA • (425) 284-1540

WISEMAN'S APPLIANCE
2619 California Ave SW
Seattle, WA • (206) 937-7400

CONKLIN'S APPLIANCE
5810 196th SW
Lynnwood, WA • 425-776-3184

CROSSROADS APPLIANCE
15625 NE 8th #E
Bellevue, WA • (425) 746-0550

JACK ROBERTS APPLIANCE
18815 Aurora Ave N
Shoreline, WA • (206) 542-8911